



Identity Thieves Taking Aim at Cellphones

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Contact: Ashley Huibregtse, 608-224-5002

Jim Dick, Communications Director, 608-224-5020

MADISON – The Wisconsin Department of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection (DATCP) cautions that criminals are using a new tool to get at valuable personal information: texts to your cellphone.

“Cellphone spam is annoying enough, especially when you’re paying for each text,” said Sandy Chalmers, the Division Administrator of Trade and Consumer Protection. “What’s more, that text message may be from crooks eager to get their hands on your personal information and bank account.”

In October, consumers throughout the U.S. were bombarded by text messages claiming to be from well-known banks, saying “your card has been deactivated,” and listing a phone number. People who dialed the number were asked for account information, Social Security numbers and other personal identification numbers. With a victim's information in hand, the criminals can drain bank accounts, buy things with your charge card, or set up a phony charge account.

DATCP offers these consumer tips to help protect you from cellphone text scams:

- If you receive a text about an account, do not respond. Call your bank or credit card company directly to check whether there is a problem with your account.
- Distribute your wireless number sparingly. Criminals surf the net to collect phone numbers from social networking sites and directories.
- Before you provide your wireless number or other information online, read the website privacy policy to see if the company sells your information. Some may have a box to check to indicate that you do not want to receive messages from them or their partnering businesses.
- Contact your wireless service for information on blocking or reporting unwanted text messages.

“Many wireless service providers allow consumers to block texts originating from internet addresses, the source of most spam,” concluded Chalmers. “If you are looking for a way to block all texts or to reduce spam, check with your wireless service.”

For more information, contact the Bureau of Consumer Protection’s toll-free hotline at 1-800-422-7128 or email at datcp hotline@wi.gov.

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